

lest he be consumed

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by [thisissirius](#)

Summary

“Eddie,” Buck says, crouching down, hand to Eddie’s cheek. “There’s nothing you can do here, now, that will make me leave, you understand?”

set post-eddie begins.

(one nsfw word)

Notes

for eli, who never fails to understand my eddie feelings.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Buck doesn't leave the hospital; his heart's been pounding since the rig crashed down and buried Eddie beneath tons of dirt and mud. There's a part of him that'll always be there, in that moment, but right now he's focused on something else; Eddie, who looks half-asleep when Buck walks into his room.

"The hospital is releasing you."

Eddie looks up from where he's sitting on the edge of the bed. There are cuts and bruises on his face, dark smudges under his eyes, and Buck can see him shaking where he's pulling on his sock. He's mostly dressed, the rest of his clothes next to him on the bed, and shoes waiting by the bedside cabinet.

Eddie's frowning. "Buck? Why are you here?"

"We decided I should take you home," Buck says. He leaves out the part where he bullied almost everyone into letting him, not that they put up much of a fight. Eddie's wallet, phone and keys are resting on a sweater Buck doesn't recognize. He assumed Eddie's borrowing clothes; nobody else left the hospital.

"You don't have to," Eddie protests.

Buck shrugs. "I'm not letting you drive."

Eddie blinks, still shivering. "M'cold."

"I know," Buck says gently, carefully moving things from the sweater. "Come on, buddy, let's get this on."

Eddie winces. "Everything aches. Never," he says, aiming for levity and missing by a mile, "get buried alive."

"Shut up, Eddie," Buck says, not unkindly. Eddie immediately shuts his mouth and Buck feels bad, runs his hand over Eddie's hair. It's still damp, but from the feel of it, and the lingering smell around Eddie, they've done a basic clean. "Did you shower?"

"Washed," Eddie explains. "Checked I wasn't injured."

Buck hums. "You can shower when we get home, okay?"

"You're coming?" Eddie sounds surprised, but there's a touch of hope as well.

Buck smiles, nodding, and stands up. "Let's get you dressed and out of here."

Eddie's not much help as Buck eases him into the hoodie, and as Buck crouches down to help with the boots, he can't help but smile at the state of Eddie's clothes. His sweatpants are tucked into the top of the socks and Buck sorts him out, winces at the vicious redness of Eddie's skin. He cradles Eddie's ankles as he puts the boots on, trying to be mindful of the wounds.

“Please don’t,” Eddie says, when Buck looks up.

“What?”

“Don’t,” Eddie starts, eyes darting away. “Don’t treat me like—”

“I’ll treat you how I want,” Buck says, a little harsher than he means to. He winces right after, finishes tying Eddie’s boots and stands. “Don’t treat you like what?”

Eddie fiddles with his keys, slides his phone and wallet into the pocket of his sweater. “Like I’m—”

“You are,” Buck says, even though he doesn’t know what Eddie’s thinking.

For a moment, Eddie looks like he’s going to argue, but he doesn’t. He averts his eyes, stays a step behind Buck as they walk out to the car. Buck doesn’t know why Eddie’s not willing to accept his care, why he’s so against Buck being gentle with him, but he’s not going to stop giving it. Eddie’s not the kind of guy who can accept help when it’s offered freely and Buck knows this, which is why he’s not going to ask.

Hopefully, somehow, he’ll coax out of Eddie what’s going through his head.

The drive home isn’t as quiet as Buck’s expecting.

As soon as they’re buckled in and on the way, Eddie reaches over, rests a hand on Buck’s thigh. He’s looking out of the window, cheeks a little pink, and he swallows once, twice. Buck keeps most of his attention on the road, but he can’t help risking a couple of looks.

“Hen told me,” he says eventually.

“Oh,” Buck winces. Chewing on the inside of his cheek, he doesn’t know what to say. The weight of Eddie’s hand is nice. “Sorry.”

Eddie squeezes his thigh. “Don’t be, Buck. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Which time? When I clawed at dirt, or accused them of thinking you were dead?”

Sucking in a breath, Eddie’s fingers twitch. “Okay, so the second one. Didn’t know about the first.”

“Fuck,” Buck says quietly. “I just—couldn’t handle it, man.”

Eddie’s quiet for a moment, but doesn’t move his hand away. “I was scared.”

Buck's hands tighten on the wheel and he desperately wants to look at Eddie, but he's not sure he can risk it. Eddie's reluctant at the best of times to speak about his emotions and whatever's going on is tentative and fragile. Buck's not gonna ruin it.

"I—the radio," Eddie's explaining, forehead against the window. His fingers are lax on Buck's leg but it's still there; Buck takes it as a win. "I tried calling for you guys but you didn't hear. I thought—I don't want to die."

"Hey," Buck says, because Eddie's voice breaks on the last, and finds somewhere to pull over. When he does, he shifts in the seat, Eddie pulling his hand back immediately. Buck touches Eddie's cheek, turns his face around. "You didn't Eddie, you hear me? You're right here. You're not going anywhere, you're not allowed to."

Eddie nods, swallowing a couple of times; Buck can see his eyes are wet, still trembling despite the heat in the car. "I thought I would."

"You didn't," Buck says a little more forcefully. "You can't keep your head there, Eds. You gotta be here, with me."

A pause. "I'm here."

"Good." Buck waits a few more moments before pulling back. "Need more heat?"

"Don't think it's my body," Eddie admits, curling deeper into his sweater. Buck pulls away and Eddie drops his head back against the seat. "It was cold down there."

Buck nods. "Well, it's warm up here, and when we get home, you can have a hot shower."

Eddie closes his eyes, lips forming a small smile. "Can't wait."

Carla's asleep in the chair when they get there.

"She stayed?" Eddie says.

"Duh," Buck tells him. "Go get in the shower, I've got Carla."

Eddie hesitates, but at Buck's stern look, nods and heads down the hall.

"Carla?" Buck doesn't wanna startle her too much, but he touches her arm. She jerks awake instantly, calming when she sees it's him. "Thanks for staying."

"Of course I did," she says, staring over Buck's shoulder. "He with you?"

Buck nods. "Going for a shower. You need me to drive you home?"

Standing, Carla rolls her eyes. “Don’t be stupid, I know my way home. You take care of him, you hear?”

“Both of them,” Buck promises, accepting Carla’s hug. “I promise.”

“Call me if they need anything.”

Buck assures her that he will and walks her to the door. He’s not happy about her driving so late, but he’s done so on more than one occasion so he can’t judge her. Waiting until her lights have disappeared round the bend of the street, Buck locks the door and heads to find Eddie; he can’t hear the shower and he’s a little worried.

Eddie's hovering awkwardly in the hall, hand on Chris' door.

"Eddie?"

Startled, Eddie looks up. "I was just gonna check."

"Okay."

Eddie makes a face, pulls his hand back. "I don't know if I should."

"If you need to," Buck says, stepping closer, “you should."

"I failed him."

It comes from nowhere. Buck presses forward, buries his face in Eddie's hair, hands on Eddie’s shoulders. "Maybe," he allows, because saying no feels like the wrong thing to do, "but you're here now. You've been here."

Eddie's breath is shaky. "Does that make up for ignoring him for seven years?"

"Hey," Buck turns Eddie around. "You didn't ignore him. Unless you're telling me you didn't once think about him when you were overseas."

“Every day,” Eddie admits. It’s the first thing he’s ever said to Buck about the service — beyond the shit with the medal that morning — and Buck’s grateful enough for it he keeps his mouth shut. “I’m trying.”

Buck squeezes Eddie’s shoulders. “I know. Check up on him, Eddie, and I’ll start the shower.”

“Not sure I’m up for that.”

“Well you’re not getting between those sheets smelling like that,” Buck says, ignoring Eddie’s glare. It’s not up to his usual standards anyway. “Unless you actually don’t want to —”

Eddie closes his eyes. “I’m tired and I don’t think I can stand up for that long, but I feel like shit.”

“Then I’ll help,” Buck says matter-of-fact, and at Eddie’s sceptical look, he snorts, lifting an eyebrow. “Not like you didn’t when I needed it, Eddie.”

“That’s different.”

“Because it’s you asking for help?” Buck knows he’s hit on the point because Eddie goes still beneath his hands. “Eddie, I’m not asking.”

Eddie snorts, the first sign of genuine humour Buck’s seen in him all night. “You telling me, Buckley?”

“I did SEAL training; I could wrestle you into the shower, but I’ll probably be sad about it.”

A quiet laugh, and Eddie ducks his head, still smiling. “You’re an idiot.”

“Yep,” Buck says, tapping Eddie’s hip before he moves away. “Check on your kid, Diaz, and I’ll start the shower.”

Eddie undresses most of the way by himself. Buck winces at the bruises and scrapes that are revealed, and is grateful the hospital has treated most of them. They’re mostly superficial, but as Eddie turns around, Buck can see three scars. They’re silvery white, indicative of old wounds, and not ones Buck’s seen before. There are stalls at the station; it’s not like they’re constantly naked around each other, but Buck’s seen them before. He doesn’t think he’s ever reacted quite this way before and he doesn’t know what to make of it.

There’s also the St. Christopher medal settling against his breastbone.

“Ready?”

“I’m probably gonna crash and drown,” Eddie says, sighing.

“Don’t be dramatic. I’m not about to let you die in your shower, Eddie.” Buck peels back the curtain.

Eddie pauses, stares at the running water, then at Buck, ducking his eyes. “Can you—”

Buck waits him out, not wanting to put thoughts and words into Eddie’s mouth.

“Don’t worry,” Eddie says.

Curling his fingers around Eddie’s wrist, Buck squeezes gently. “I’m not in your head, Eddie. You have to ask.”

It's not a fair thing to do; Eddie's having an emotional day, but Buck doesn't want to make it worse by shoving himself on Eddie. He needs Eddie to ask for it, to let Buck know it's okay to overstep those boundaries.

"I can't," Eddie says quietly, not quite a whisper. He shivers, gaze caught on Buck's fingers around his wrist. He moves, holds Buck's hand and squeezes. "I want—"

Buck breathes out slowly. "You want me to come in with you?"

Looking relieved, Eddie nods. He huffs an awkward laugh. "Don't wanna pass out alone."

Buck's quiet when he sheds most of his clothes, Eddie turning away. The back of his neck is pink, a flush down his back, and Buck's chest aches. He doesn't know the reason for Eddie's awkwardness, his reluctance to admit to hurts and aches, physical or otherwise, but the fact that he's trying is all Buck needs. When he's down to his briefs, he rests a hand gently on Eddie's arm. "I've got you, Eddie."

Eddie turns and there's something vulnerable on his face. "Promise?"

Again, the heartbreak. "Yeah, Eddie, I promise."

They strip the rest of the way and Buck tries not to stare; it's difficult because it's *Eddie*, and Buck won't ever not be attracted to him. It's easy to ignore it, to focus on making sure Eddie gets clean and feels comfortable.

"How's the aching?"

Eddie shrugs, rolling his shoulders under the water. He turns so that he's facing Buck, eyes closed as he tips under the water. Buck breathes out slowly, reaching out a hand to touch Eddie's hair, scratching lightly at Eddie's scalp. Something in Eddie gives and he shivers, a full body thing, and lets out a soft groan.

"Eddie," Buck says.

"S' nice," Eddie slurs.

It prompts Buck to move. He reaches for the shampoo, hand sliding down Eddie's chest and pushing lightly. "Turn back around."

Eddie goes without comment, surprising Buck again. Buck lathers up the shampoo in Eddie's hair, massaging gently into his scalp. With every slow scrape of his nails over Eddie's head, Eddie goes a little boneless, relaxes back against Buck's chest. He's breathing slow, head dipped, and Buck can't help but press a kiss to his shoulder.

"Rinse," Buck says quietly.

Eddie winces when he tries to lift his arms, so Buck helps him out, protecting Eddie's eyes. Eddie looks a little dazed when he opens his eyes, putting a hand on Buck's hip. The moment stretches and Buck reaches for a washcloth.

“Let’s get you washed up.” Buck’s talking mostly for his own benefit, to fill the silence, but Eddie doesn’t stop him; he keeps a hand on Buck’s shoulder, watching with eyes half-lidded as Buck wipes away the dirt and grime of the day. He’s careful around the wounds, gentle with the bruise on Eddie’s hip, the soreness of the skin. When he bends down to do Eddie’s legs and feet, he’s so focused on his task that he doesn’t think *Eddie’s naked*, not even when he carefully washes the inside of Eddie’s thighs, around his soft cock, the curve of his hip bones.

Eddie’s still watching him, and when Buck stands, gesturing for Eddie to rinse off, Eddie slides his hands around Buck’s shoulders, drawing him in for a hug. Buck’s thought about this moment for a long time, being naked with Eddie in a shower, but he’s never considered this; the only thing he’s doing is holding him. Eddie’s still trembling, so Buck wraps his arms tight around Eddie’s shoulders, one hand on the back of his head. “I’ve got you.”

Perhaps it’s the vulnerability of the moment, but Eddie just lets out a soft noise, almost a sob, and keeps his face against Buck’s shoulder. “Buck.”

“I’m here,” Buck tells him. “I promised I have you and I do, Eds, I do.”

Buck doesn’t count the moments they stand there; Eddie doesn’t sob again, and the water remains somewhat hot, but when they part, Eddie’s eyes are red, his expression wary. He opens his mouth, then closes it. Keeping the silence, Buck waits for Eddie to rinse off, then shuts off the water.

“Here,” Buck says, reaching for the towels on the heating rack. They’re the fluffiest Eddie possesses, warm and gentle as Buck helps dry as much of Eddie as possible. Seemingly happy to let him, Eddie goes where Buck prompts, sitting on the toilet while Buck ties his own towel around his waist, head tipping forward when Buck deals with his hair. His fingers rest lightly on Buck’s hips, thumbs playing with the top of the towel and the moment seems to stretch, thick with emotion and something Buck can’t name. “Okay?”

Eddie nods, looking tired. He runs a hand over his jaw, making a face at the stubble, but the look he gives the razor is less than appealing. “I feel—”

“Gross? Dishevelled? Ugly,” Buck says, drawing the last word out in a sing-song voice. Eddie snorts, lips quirking into a small smile, and rolls his eyes. “As if,” Buck continues, running his own fingers over the shape of Eddie’s jaw. Buck knows how close he came to losing this; the intimacy, the softness, *Eddie*. He bites back on the terror, the lingering guilt, and focuses on Eddie. “You want some help?”

“I—” Eddie trails off, eyes wide. Is this the line, Buck thinks, but doesn’t move. Eddie’s got their future in his hands and Buck trusts him. “Buck.”

“Eddie,” Buck says, crouching down, hand to Eddie’s cheek. “There’s nothing you can do here, now, that will make me leave, you understand?”

It takes a while, but Eddie nods, his face clearing; maybe he does understand. “Stay. I need —.” After the pause, Buck drops his hand to Eddie’s knee, squeezes. Eddie watches him,

tongue darting out to lick at his bottom lip, eyelashes flickering against his cheek as he closes his eyes, opens them. "I want to shave, eat, sleep."

"Alright," Buck says quietly, and reaches for the razor.

Eddie's hands stay on Buck's hips; he tilts his head back obediently, eyes closing, and the trust in the simple movement, the exposing of his throat, Buck doesn't know if Eddie understands what he's offering. For someone who so often doesn't know what to say, who struggles with liking himself let alone loving, Eddie is giving such a gift; and Buck knows that's what it is. That he gets to have Eddie at all will always be precious.

Time moves like molasses; everything narrows down to the drag of the razor, the lightness of Eddie's hands on his hips, the slow breathing. Buck's chest aches with love for Eddie, itching with the need to make sure Eddie's protected, loved, feels comfortable in his own skin. They're things that will take time, but Buck's got an eternity.

"There," Buck says when he's done, scratching his fingers through Eddie's hair. Eddie takes a moment to open his eyes, and when he does, he looks relaxed. Wrapping his fingers around Buck's wrist, he tangles their fingers together, squeezing. "Feel better?"

Eddie nods, drops his head forward until it's resting against Buck's stomach. Buck's aware that most of him is dry, but he's got a wet towel around his waist, and Eddie's shivering a little in the cold.

Leaning down, Buck presses a kiss to the top of Eddie's head. "Food."

Buck leaves Eddie sitting on the edge of the bed to dress. He knows where everything is in the kitchen and it doesn't take him long to put together a sandwich; he doesn't think Eddie has much more in him and he wants to be sure Eddie's fed before he sleeps. There's been no movement from the bedroom and Buck's half afraid his plan is going to shit, but Eddie's still in there, sweatpants on but nothing else, staring into space.

"Eddie?" Buck keeps his voice low, puts the plate on the bedside cabinet. "You with me?"

Eddie says nothing.

Buck steps closer. "Eddie?"

Eddie blinks, looks up. "Sorry."

"Don't apologize." Buck rests a hand on his shoulder. "Put your shirt on before you get cold."

Eddie blows out a breath and then stands up, stops Buck moving away with a hand on his neck. There are words in there, Buck knows, but Eddie's fighting them, eyes darting from Buck's face and then back again. When Eddie takes a little shuffle forward, Buck's fingers go to Eddie's waist, steadying them both. Between one breath and the next, their foreheads are touching.

"I'm so tired," Eddie says quietly. His fingers twitch against Buck's neck. The small tells; twitching when he's uncomfortable, looking away when he's saying something important, the

quiver to his voice from fear. Eddie being afraid of his own feelings is heartbreaking, and Buck wants to take it all away. “I think—I’m not okay but I don’t know what to do about it.”

“That’s okay,” Buck says. “If you want to talk, we can find someone new,” he continues, stroking a hand through Eddie’s hair. Eddie’s relaxing a little under Buck’s hands and he keeps talking, “if you don’t want to talk to someone else, I’m here, Eddie.”

“I,” Eddie says, pushing away. He’s shutting down and Buck doesn’t want that.

“Stop,” Buck says, stroking his fingers down Eddie’s temple. It’s an intimate gesture, one that Eddie allows. His eyes go soft and he opens his mouth a little, awed. Buck keeps going, traces the line of Eddie’s cheek, his jaw, down the back of his neck. “We all break sometimes,” he starts, voice cracking. “We all have our own worries and issues, Eddie, but you’re not alone. You’ve got me.”

Eddie nods, looking surprised as he does, and leans into the touch on the back of his neck. Buck tightens his fingers a fraction, free hand resting on Eddie’s hip. Eddie sags a little in Buck’s hold, looking down at the floor. “I don’t wanna talk in here.”

“Living room then,” Buck says, stroking his fingers once more down Eddie’s neck. “I need to grab a shirt and pants.”

“You know where,” Eddie says, still not looking at Buck as he pulls away, leaving the room without a backward glance.

Buck’s a little worried he’ll close up before he gets out there, but he’s gotta trust Eddie’s listening to him; that he’ll talk, even if he might not want to. The first time is the hardest and Buck knows once Eddie takes the step, it’ll be easier to admit to whatever he’s got running around inside his head. Buck wants to take some of the strain, share the burden; he likes to think they’re a team, he just needs to remind Eddie that they are.

Grabbing the sandwich before he leaves the room, he makes his way through the quiet house, checking on Chris as he does. He can’t help it himself, wants to make sure everyone’s in the house and safe. Closing the door gently, he takes a deep breath, gives himself a moment. Carrying someone else’s feelings isn’t easy but there’s time enough for him; today’s about Eddie.

The living room is dark, Eddie perched on the edge of the couch. The same position he sat in on the bed and Buck wonders if he just can’t get comfortable, can’t settle.

“You need to eat something,” he says, holding out the plate. Eddie stares at it, frowning, but he takes it anyway. “Don’t just pick at it.”

“Yes, Dad,” Eddie says with an eye roll, but he actually tears off part of the sandwich so Buck takes it as a win.

Settling on the couch next to him, Buck sits back and gets comfortable. He doesn’t know how long they’re gonna be there — as long as Eddie needs — but he’s got a plan to get them both comfortable. “You want something on in the background?”

Eddie hesitates, shakes his head no, but looks at the TV. So yes. Buck flicks on the TV and watches Eddie’s shoulders relax. Eventually, through a series of commercials and a very bad comedy sketch, Eddie sinks back into the couch, sliding the plate across the coffee table as he does. Buck waits until the next run of commercials and then reaches over, takes Eddie’s hand. Eddie’s stopped shaking at least.

“You warmer?”

Watching their clasped hands, Eddie nods, face shifting through a series of emotions, before he says, “I called on the radio.”

Buck’s chest constricts, his breath taking a moment to come. They’re Eddie’s words from before, in the truck, but Buck knows Eddie needs to say them again and he squeezes Eddie’s hand, lets him continue.

“Nobody was answering.” Eddie’s voice cracks. “I’ve never—even when I was overseas, I’ve never been trapped like that, never had to, to imagine I wouldn’t get out.” Eddie’s still looking at their hands, tracing the back of Buck’s hand with his thumb; his grip is tight, an anchor Buck thinks, and tugs Eddie closer. Eddie comes willingly, settles against Buck’s side, hiding his face in Buck’s shoulder. Buck doesn’t mind if he hides, as long as he gets what he needs from it. “I thought I was going to die. I almost did.”

It comes out as a whisper and Buck’s instantly taken back to that moment, to the looks on everyone’s faces as they told him they weren’t thinking worst case. Except they were. Buck remembers doing it himself, the hollow feeling in his chest, the idea of living without Eddie just *wasn’t*. Buck can’t do it.

“You’re here,” Buck says, as much for himself as Eddie. “Whatever happened, you’re here and you fought like hell.”

“Too late,” Eddie says.

Buck stares, not sure he’s heard right. “What are you talking about?”

Eddie shifts against Buck’s shoulder. They’ve slept in this position so many times at the station, but Buck knows it isn’t always comfortable. He moves them both until he’s sideways on the couch, Eddie hesitating before he settles between Buck’s legs.

“It’s okay to want it,” Buck whispers. “Comfort isn’t something you have to earn, Eddie.”

“I don’t think that,” Eddie says petulantly, but he leans his head back against Buck’s shoulder. He doesn’t have to look at Buck this way, and Buck can wrap his arms around

Eddie, kiss the curve of his neck. Eddie's accepting the comfort, the touches, the kisses. Buck hopes, but he doesn't know; not yet. After a pause, Eddie lays his hands over Buck's, stroking the back of Buck's knuckles. "I thought of Chris."

Buck startles. "In the hole?"

Eddie nods, his hair tickling Buck's cheek. It's drying soft and Buck turns his face into it, breathes in a scent that's all Eddie. "I couldn't stop; saving Hayden reminded me of Chris growing up. You know," he says with a scoff, "I wasn't even there."

"Eddie."

"Please don't," Eddie says, squeezing Buck's hands gently. "I won't be able to if you—"

"Alright," Buck soothes, nosing Eddie's temple. "I've got you."

Eddie lets out a shaky breath. He talks, tells Buck of his memories; failing Chris, failing Shannon, his deployment, the wounds. Buck unconsciously strokes a hand over Eddie's skin, knows where the scars are from memory alone. He can't help but kiss Eddie's temple, tighten his grip a little. Eddie starts to talk about his parents and Buck knows about shitty parents, memories of his own that keep him up at night, but he aches for Eddie.

"—told me not to bring Chris down with me," Eddie says. He's trembling again and Buck can hear the waver in his voice. He brushes his hand over Eddie's chest. "I was just trying to be a good father."

"I know," Buck says, because he doesn't know what else will help.

"I brought Chris here and then everything with Shannon—"

There's a break in the talking and Eddie starts to shake. It's not cold, not fear; crying, Buck realizes, and he shifts them until he's got Eddie properly in his arms. Wrapping himself around Eddie is easy, taking away his hurt is not. The sobs come next, a soft noise that Buck doesn't know if he'll ever shake, but he does what he can.

"I've got you," he whispers, closing his eyes as he buries his face in Eddie's hair. "I've got you."

When they part, when Eddie lifts his head, he doesn't push away. "Sorry." His face is damp, red eyes and tear-stained cheeks, and Buck wipes them away, thumbs brushing the skin softly.

"Sweetheart," he says, tone gentle, "You've got nothing to be sorry for."

Eddie refuses to meet Buck's eyes and he's still trembling, hands clenching and unclenching against his lap.

"Eddie?" Buck waits until Eddie finally looks up at him, and he leans in, presses a kiss to the corner of Eddie's mouth. He's always imagined it feeling scarier, but looking after Eddie makes everything less frightening. Eddie's eyes are wide, but he's reaching for Buck before

Buck's pulled away. Buck starts talking. "I mean it. You made mistakes, but you're not a terrible person."

"I—" Eddie starts. "Buck, I left him behind."

"Where are you right now?"

Eddie blinks, frowning. "What?"

"Where are you, Eddie?" Buck keeps his tone quiet and even, hands on Eddie's face.

"Home."

"With?"

Something in Eddie's face clears. "You. Chris."

"Chris," Buck repeats. "You're here, now. You haven't left him behind, Eddie, he's right here."

Eddie's hands eventually go to Buck's sweater, fisting the material in his fingers. Buck smiles, kissing the top of Eddie's head. He's content to sit here for a moment, but he knows it's not the most comfortable of couches, especially not for someone who's recently been buried.

Eddie settles against him, head tucked under Buck's chin, and they turn their attention to whatever's on the TV. Buck doesn't want to move them just yet, concerned that Eddie's emotional turmoil won't settle just yet.

It doesn't take long for Eddie to go lax against him, breath evening out, and Buck hopes Eddie catches up on whatever sleep he can; from the twitching of his fingers, he'll be having a nightmare before too long. It hurts that Buck can't take those away from Eddie as well. He can just be here, hand in Eddie's hair, doing his best to protect Eddie from whatever hurts he can't deal with.

Mid-way through an episode of a comedy show he's not really watching, Eddie twitches, starts to whimper. It's a noise that cuts through Buck's chest like a knife, and he squeezes Eddie's side. Eddie jerks a little in his grasp and sucks in a breath, whimpers again, grips Buck's sweater until his knuckles are white. He's shaking, scrabbling at the couch and Buck's leg, and Buck feels a little helpless; "Eddie? Eddie, sweetheart, I need you to wake up."

Eddie doesn't respond.

"Eddie," Buck says, voice a little higher, trying not to disturb Chris. With another jerk, Eddie's head snaps up, and he shifts to the other end of the couch. His eyes are wide, hands up between them, trying to ward Buck off. It's not the first time Eddie's done this; a couple of times at the station, he's come awake suddenly, up and out of the bunk in a second, looking around the room as though unsure of where he is. Buck's always in the room and he's never thought about why that is, but now he can't help but wonder if he's a catalyst; he hopes it's

because Eddie feels safe enough to sleep in front of him. Holding up his own hands, Buck ducks his head, tries to meet Eddie's eyes. "You with me?"

Chest rising and falling rapidly, Eddie's eyes are darting around the room. He swallows, looking at Buck. "Buck?"

"Yeah," Buck says. "I'm here. You know where you are?"

Instead of answering, Eddie takes one look at him and something in his face crumples. Buck doesn't hesitate; he moves between breaths, taking Eddie in his arms. Eddie clings to his shoulders, exhausted, crying, and muttering something Buck can't make out.

"Eddie," Buck says, knows he sounds devastated but he *is*. Eddie hurting means Buck is hurting. "I'm here. I've got you."

Eddie's body is still shaking with the force of his emotion, but Buck can't tell if he's still crying. Eddie won't move back far enough for him to see, so Buck gives him time, holds as tight as he dares. There's another exhale against his neck. "I don't want to feel like this anymore."

"I know, baby, I know." Buck regrets the word as soon as it's out.

Eddie's grip doesn't lessen, he doesn't stiffen up; he seems to relax more, in fact, and turns his face into Buck's neck. "Never been someone's baby before."

"You're mine," Buck promises, hand moving to Eddie's hair. He can't help it; Eddie's hair is soft, feels good beneath Buck's fingers, and he doesn't know if he'll ever get tired of the way Eddie goes boneless beneath his hands. "Not just that," he continues. "You're everything to me, Eddie."

This time, Eddie does freeze. He pulls back and there's a turmoil in his expression that Buck hates. "Buck—"

"Listen to me," Buck says, clasping Eddie's face in his hands. "I need you to hear me, Eddie. Love isn't a big enough word for what you are to me. It doesn't explain how much it hurts when you're not around. It doesn't explain how terrified I am of losing you, and it sure as hell doesn't explain the lengths I would go to make sure you don't hurt anymore. But I do love you. I love you so much I don't know what to do with it."

Eddie's breathing heavy, his fingers tight on Buck's arms; but he's not pulling away, he's just staring, eyes wide.

Buck smiles and knows it's a touch sad. "It's okay if you—"

"I don't know," Eddie starts, "why you'd want—"

"Eddie," Buck says. "You don't have to know, you just have to believe me."

"I do," Eddie says without hesitation. "You never—I believe you."

Buck runs his thumb over the curve of Eddie's cheek. Eddie deserves it, he thinks; the touches, the love Buck can't stop.

There's a hitch in Eddie's breath. "I don't want you to leave."

"I won't—"

"No," Eddie says, tightening his grip. "I don't want you to leave ever. When you go out that door—I want you to come right back through it. I've never—it's only ever been Shannon and I've never—it hurts when I think about us because I don't think I'm—" Eddie closes his eyes. "I told Bobby once, told Frank I don't think — I'm not enough, Buck. Nobody ever—"

"You're enough for me," Buck says. Eddie's eyes snap open. "Don't you understand yet, Eddie? There's nobody else in this world that will ever mean half as much to me as you do, as Chris does. I'm lonely, I'm not gonna pretend I'm not, but when I'm around you, when I think about how you make me feel, I know I'm not. You gave me Chris; you're the best thing in my life, Eddie, and I know it's hard for you to hear, but I swear, I'll never leave you. You'll have to throw me out."

"Never," Eddie says quickly, dragging Buck closer. "You can't—"

"I won't," Buck soothes, "I promise I won't."

Eddie breathes out; it goes on for long enough that Buck wonders if he's been holding it in for a very long time. Eddie whispers, "You're mine too."

Buck closes his eyes because he knows it's true, Eddie doesn't lie to him, but it's hard to hear.

"If I have to listen to you," Eddie says, regaining some of his usual demeanour, "then you have to listen to me. You're mine. I'm not leaving *you*."

It takes them a while to move to the bedroom; Eddie does check on Chris, lingering in the doorway, and Buck watches from the hall, running a hand up Eddie's back. They're silent around each other in the bathroom, then the bedroom, and Buck slides between Eddie's sheets, trying not to feel like he shouldn't be there. It lasts only as long as it takes Eddie to roll over, settle against Buck, head pillowed on Buck's shoulder.

Eddie lays a hand over Buck's stomach. "Can you— help me find someone who isn't Frank."

"Whatever you need," Buck promises.

"I don't know if I'll ever be okay."

"That's okay, too," Buck says, pressing a kiss to the top of Eddie's head. "I love you, Eddie, that's not conditional on how you're feeling."

"Promise?" Eddie asks, sounding as vulnerable as he did in the bathroom.

"Fuck yes, I promise," Buck says, letting out a soft sob of his own. "You've got me now, sweetheart, and you're not getting rid of me."

Buck's starting to drift off when he feels Eddie shift.

"Buck?" Eddie waits until Buck gives an assenting noise then shifts back so he can look Buck in the eye, his lips curving into a familiar smile. "Call me sweetheart outside of this house and I'll kill you."

Buck buries his face in Eddie's hair and laughs.

End Notes

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